

NEPTIS MARCI SP. NOV. – AN UNUSUAL NEW SUB-MONTANE BUTTERFLY FROM KIVU, ZAIRESTEVE C. COLLINS¹ & TORBEN B. LARSEN²¹ P. O. Box 14308, Nairobi, Kenya.² 358 Coldharbour Lane, London SE9 8PL, UK.**Introduction**

THE GENUS *NEPTIS* is one of the most interesting butterfly genera in the world. It is also one of the most difficult. There is a large number of species in the Afrotropical Region, and many others in the Oriental Region. A smaller number has adapted to the temperate zone, and two of these occur even in Europe.

The genitalia of the *Neptis* are strongly differentiated, but genitalic characters do not necessarily match morphological characters. There are strong similarities between the genitalia of Oriental and Afrotropical species that share no morphological characters. There are strong genitalic differences between other species that are morphologically almost indistinguishable. I believe the genus must have evolved at the time during the Miocene, when a belt of tropical habitats stretched from London to Japan, after which a cooling of climate pushed them southwards, where the tropical species are currently disjunct (the only Arabian species is *Neptis serena annah* Larsen, 1982, and that is limited to Yemen). Some species, however, managed to adapt to Palaearctic conditions instead of moving south.

In Africa there is a group of species centred on *Neptis nysiades* Hewitson, 1868, which drove Eltringham (1922) to the following despair: The male armatures are as variable as the patterns, and the whole assembly must for the present be regarded as an unstable species, possibly modified by intra-generic mimicry of the kind so elaborately illustrated by the multiple forms of *Heliconius melpomene*. I can only suggest that any form that does not present the distinctive characteristics of better-defined species and of which the male armature is not well characterised should be referred to *nysiades*, until longer series from many localities may perhaps enable us to revise these forms in a more systematic manner.

The African Butterfly Research Institute (ABRI), Nairobi has a huge holding of African *Neptis*, and I have begun their revision. My findings so far match those of Eltringham, except that I am quite sure that the morphology/genitalia indicate that at least a dozen, and possibly two dozen, species are definitely involved in the *N. nysiades*-complex. There is one in the ABRI collection, however, which is so different from all other species, that it deserves an immediate description.

Neptis marci sp. nov. (Plate A)

Male upperside: Forewing: 23 mm. The forewings are deep black, as is the case with other montane *Neptis* (e.g. *N. lugubris* Rebel, 1914), with the following white markings: On the forewing there is a well developed white double spot in spaces 1a and 1b, aligned with the end of the hindwing white band. There is a somewhat

smaller, fused double spot in spaces 2 and 3. There is a third group of fused spots in spaces 5-8, not quite reaching the costa. The three groups are better separated than in other species with such a pattern. The cell is unmarked. The shape of the forewing is more squat than in most *Neptis*. On the hindwing there is a white discal band from space 1a to space 6, broadening considerably towards space 5, as in *N. lugubris*. On all four wings the white markings are of the intense white typical of montane species and the usual submarginal white lines of the upperside are almost obsolescent.



Plate A. *Neptis marci* sp. nov. Holotype male (upperside). Butuohe, Kivu, Zaïre, 2000 m, vii.1987 (S.C. Collins – in African Butterfly Research Institute (ARRI), Nairobi).

Male underside: The ground colour is a deep chocolate-brown with no hint of reddish or orange. The white markings are as above, except for three narrow, continuous white submarginal lines on all four wings, just broken by the veins. The inner of these three lines is somewhat wider than the other two, broadening perceptibly towards the apex of the forewing. The inner half of the hindwing costa is broadly white. The basal markings in the forewing cell and on the hindwings are vestigial. The usual, obscure white band in between the main discal band and the submarginal lines is only just indicated.

Male genitalia: The male genitalia (Fig. 1) are vaguely intermediate between those of the *N. metanira* Holland, 1892 and *N. nysiades* Hewitson, 1868 groups, no members of which could conceivably be mistaken for the present species. The two other species with three groups of white markings on the forewing and no markings in the cell, *N. poultoni* Eltringham, 1921 and *N. triponophora* Butler, 1878 have very different genitalia and differ in several other respects as well.

The three compact groups of well-spaced, fused white spots of the forewings, coupled with the complete absence of white markings in the cell, make this species recognisable at a glance. The hindwing band, tapering strongly from the widest point in space 5 to the anal fold, is characteristic of only a few montane species (e.g. *N. lugubris* and some species as yet undescribed) and of *N. nina* Staudinger, 1896 from eastern Tanzania. It is one of the most distinctive African *Neptis*, probably limited to highland forest in eastern Zaïre and, possibly, Rwanda. We have no hesitation whatever in naming it after a single specimen.

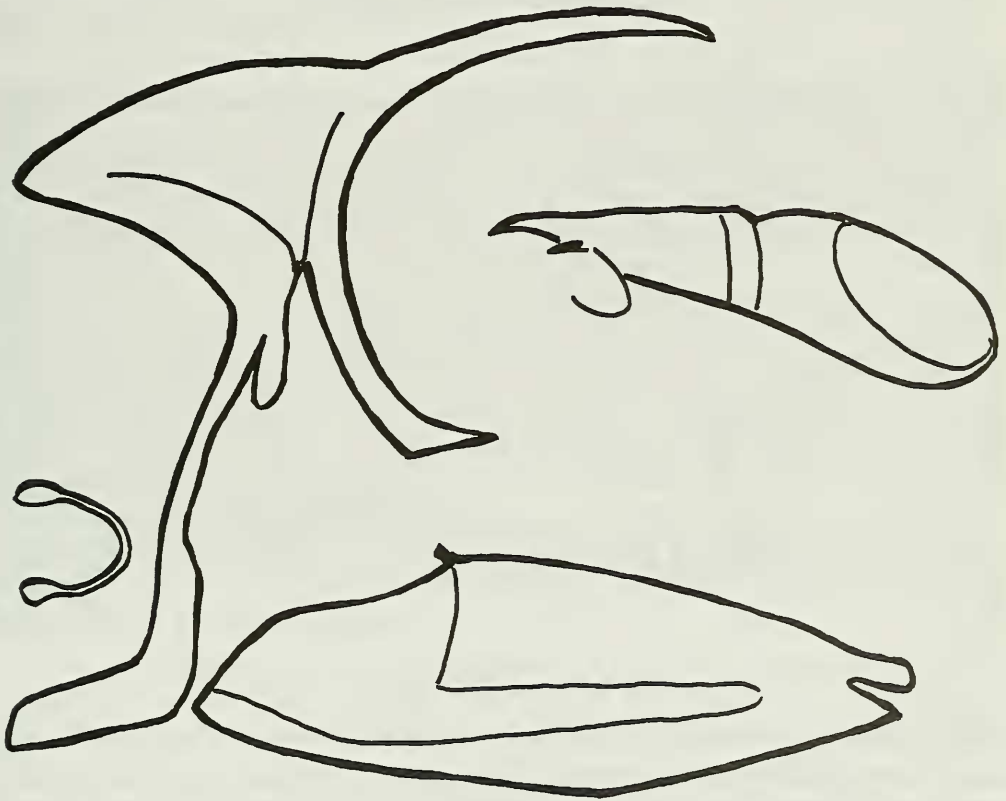


Fig. 1. Genitalia of Holotype male *Neptis marci* sp. nov.

Etymology: This species is dedicated to S.C. Collins' son, Marc, and should be pronounced with a hard c, as if the spelling was "marki".

Holotype: Male (see Plate A). Butuohe, Kivu, Zaïre, 2000 m, vii.1987 (S.C. Collins – in African Butterfly Research Institute (ABRI), Nairobi).

The submontane forests of eastern Zaïre are still not well researched and will continue to yield new endemic species as exploration continues.

Acknowledgements

This paper is No. 26 to emerge from Larsen's project Butterflies of West Africa – origins, natural history, diversity, and conservation which has received generous support from the National Research Councils and the Carlsberg Foundation in Denmark.

Reference

Eltringham, H., 1922. (1921). On the African species of the genus *Neptis* Fab. *Trans. ent. Soc. Lond.*, 1921: 532-589.

Dasytes puncticollis Reitter (Col.: Melyridae), a much-declined species in Britain?

It is a curious fact that, during my sixty-odd years and more of collecting Coleoptera in southern England mainly, I have never encountered this species (formerly known as *D. flavipes*), despite its being regarded as widespread and rather common in the south at least. Some confusion in earlier times with its close ally *D. plumbeus* Müll. (the *D. oculatus* of Fowler) is certainly possible, but cannot well be the whole explanation. I first met with *plumbeus* in 1942, and at intervals since, most often in Windsor Great Park. A far likelier reason for my failure to find *puncticollis* is that it really has declined steeply – the change apparently setting in before about 1930. When one considers that, for instance, *Chrysomela tremula* F. (formerly not rare) can seemingly vanish from the fauna within a decade or so for no assignable reason, it is evident that something of the sort may happen occasionally with other species.

Of my six specimens of *Dasytes puncticollis* it is, again, curious that all five females are from the Scilly Isles: three from Bryher kindly sent me by the late G.E. Woodroffe, June 1966, and two from the H. Dinnage collection marked "Scilly Isles" with no date or collector's name. Whether this is significant or merely coincidental is not clear, but I incline to the former. They all have a tendency to darker tibiae than the male, one indeed having them all practically black. The single male is from Bearsted, mid-Kent, 1871 (J.A. Power). Reitter's name for the species seems well chosen; for a clear statement of the differences between it and *D. plumbeus*, see P.J. Hodge and R.A. Jones, 1995, *New British Beetles*: 84-5 (BENHS).— A.A. ALLEN, 49 Montcalm Road, Charlton, London SE7 8QG.

Epiphyas postvittana Walker (Lep.: Tortricidae)

I would like to put on record the capture of two perfect specimens of *Epiphyas postvittana* in my moth trap at Thundersley, Essex, on 24 February 1998. I had several specimens during October 1997 and odd records during previous autumns but this is the first time I have recorded the species so early in the year. I believe it is breeding nearby, but so far have not found the early stages. There is a very old apple tree two gardens from mine and I believe it to be the source of this local colony.— D.G. DOWN, 16 Wood End Close, Thundersley, Benfleet, Essex SS7 3YA.